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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 142 (2014) 731 – 737

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

CIEA 2014

Aligning the academic teacher training curriculum for preschool and primary school education to the requirements of the RNCIS

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Abstract

National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education - RNCIS - is a portal application organized as a national database that includes all qualifications awarded by higher education institutions in Romania, being a tool for universities, students, social partners. According to OM 5703/2011, all higher education institutions are required to enter the information into specific section of the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS) about the competences developed through their studies offer, according to the methodology set out by the order mentioned above. However, all universities are required to ensure through the academic curricula those skills and transversal competences contained in grids displayed on RNCIS portal to all students who will have a B.A. diploma. In this article we want to describe the process of setting up the competences' grid by making correlations between professional and transversal competences and content areas, study subjects and credits allocated to major Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool (PPSP) from the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi. The working methodology consisted in several steps: research, making a draft document based on the existing framework plan, consultation with all those involved in pre-service teacher training for preschool and primary school education, leading factors of the faculty and rebuilding the original working document. After these, it will be the validation stage for the new grid and the implementation of the new curriculum.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University.

Keywords: professional competences; National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education; preschool and primary school teachers; pre-service teacher training; competence grid.

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1. General aspects

The main goal of the HRD strategic project 'Development of an operational system of qualifications in higher education in Romania' (DOCIS) was to update and correlate the qualifications provided by the Romanian higher education system to a compatible European space and with labor market needs. Through this project, three main objectives were followed: 1. development and implementation of the National Framework of Qualifications from Higher Education, 2. creating and implementing the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS), and 3. achieving a correlation study between academic qualifications and requirements of the labor market in Romania. So, the National Register of Qualifications in Higher Education (RNCIS), as a result of the DOCIS project, is a portal application organized as a national database that includes all qualifications awarded by higher education institutions in Romania, being a tool for universities, students, social partners. According to the methodology set up by the ministerial order no. 5703/2011, all higher education institutions are required to ensure through the academic curricula those skills and transversal competences contained in specific grids, particular conceived for each domain, and to facilitate by displaying on the portal of RNCIS the information about the competences developed through their studies offer to all students who will have a B.A. diploma. To achieve this requirement, there were necessary some other steps through the DOCIS project, including the development, among others activities, of a competence scale for each field domain. So, for the Education Sciences, B.A. level, major Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool (PPSP), we worked as experts together with other scholars from almost all Romanian universities and there were set up two main grids. After several stages regarding a general framework grid, research, drafts and consultations with the beneficiaries of this processes (school inspectorates, teachers' professional house, schools, kindergartens, professional organizations etc.), trade unions, researchers and practitioners with expertise in education, there was set up a first grid that contains six professional competences and three transversal competences, accompanied by level statements for each competence and standards of minimum performance for the assessment of each competence. The grid no. 1, build on the first phase of the project, refers to the description of the domain and study programme through professional and transversal competences achieved by the Bachelor of Arts as qualification level in Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool. Therefore, in this document it can be found the possible occupations, the professional and transversal competences, level descriptors of the structural elements of the professional and transversal competences and minimal performance standards of these competences. Also, before the validation stage of the grid no. 1, there was a stage for re-designing the grid by consulting the partners according to the six professional competences and three transversal competences, accompanied by level statements for each competence and standards of minimum performance for the assessment of each competence. Finally, the grid was integrated into RNCIS portal. The grid no. 2 is about the establishment of correlations between professional and transversal competences, content areas, subjects of study and allocated credits. Before explaining the process of setting up the competences' grid by making correlations between professional and transversal competences and content areas, study subjects and credits allocated to major Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool (PPSP) from the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, it was necessary to answer to some core issues. The starting point should be the definition of competence. What is competence? Then we should classify the types of the competences needed according to the level and the field domain, and decide/choose the proper ones (in our case for higher education system there are necessary professional and transversal competences specific to the labor market needs). Another question should be on how many professional and transversal competences can be achieved by a study programme? How do we set up the level descriptors of the structural elements of the professional competencies? What about the level descriptors of the transversal competencies? What are the minimal performance standards for the assessment of each professional and transversal competencies? Which are the quality indicators? Do we have appropriate tools and methods for assessing those professional and transversal competences? In the literature there are many studies on competence and what implies that. Stoof, Martens, van Merriënboer and Bastiaens (2002) tries to define the *concept of competence by focusing on its dimensions and by identifying differences with related terms*, taking into account *three variables for enhancing viability: people, goal and context*. R. Meyers (1998) implies competence as not only compliance with the certain criteria of the activity, but also a demonstration of the behavioral problems at work implementation. H. McBer (2000) says that *'teaching skills are those "micro-behaviours" that the effective teacher constantly exhibits when teaching a class.'* Raynal and Rieunier (1997) insist on the fact that the assessment criteria

are no longer represented by the results of a target group, but by the learning objectives given to each component of the group. According to Linda Allal 'an indicator is any behavior which gives information about the presence of a competence.' (apud Cardinet, 1988:135). Therefore, we consider that teaching competence is about knowledge (knows what), skills (know how) and attitude (know why), and the assessment of teaching competence implies evaluating the capacity to perform a number of professional tasks using an organized ensemble of knowledge, abilities and attitudes in various contexts of professional situations.

2. Purpose of study

Through this article we want to describe the process of setting up the competences' grid by making correlations between professional and transversal competences and content areas, study subjects and credits allocated to major Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool (PPSP) from the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi.

3. Research methodology

The research methodology aimed to a content analysis between professional and transversal competences and content areas, study subjects and credits allocated to the B.A. study programme on Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool. The emphasis was placed on content correlations of grid no. 2 according to the syllabus of B.A. study programme on Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool, as a domain of Education Sciences.

4. Findings of content analysis

In this research, we will refer only to the correlations between professional and transversal competences, subjects of study and allocated credits to the university study program of Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool from Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi. To make the description of the grid no. 2, there is necessary to evoke shortly which are the standards to fulfill the professional and transversal competences that are described in the grid no. 1. There are six professional competences needed to be achieved during the pre-service teacher training for kindergarten and primary school education: 1) designing training programs or programs adapted for different age levels/training and target groups; 2) accomplishment of educational activities in primary and preschool education; 3) assessing learning outcomes and progress of preschool/young school children; 4) managerial approaching of preschool class, teaching process and activities for learning/social integration related to the specific age of the target group; 5) counselling, guidance and educational assistance to various categories/ educational groups: preschool/primary school students, families, teachers, employees etc.; and 6) self-assessment and constant improvement of professional practices and career development. Certainly, while these six professional competences are achieved, there is necessary also to develop three transversal competences through the pre-service teacher training program: 1) application of the principles and norms of professional ethics, based on the explicit values, specific to the specialist in education sciences; 2) effective cooperation in professional and interdisciplinary working teams, specific to the development of projects and programs development in the field of education sciences, and 3) using effective methods and techniques for lifelong learning, in order to achieve pre-service and in-service professional development.

The grid no. 2 is about the establishment of correlations between professional and transversal competencies, content areas, subjects of study and allocated credits of the syllabus on Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool program. We have to mention that from the moment when the grid 1 was finished and approved, we rewrite twice the grid no. 2. Therefore, our analysis will have as starting point the first version of the grid no. 2, and, also, it will take into consideration the last version of it.

Through the first version of the grid no. 2 we analyzed the syllabus of Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool program by following each professional competence and establishing which are the theoretics/fundamental disciplines and the methodology disciplines, specifying the number of allocated credits. So, the next step was to select and group the disciplines on categories, referring to the specifics of each competence.

Regarding the allocated credits (ECTS) for theoretics/fundamental disciplines (T) and the methodology disciplines (M) according to each professional competences, we have noticed a major imbalance between professional competences: the 1st competence: 29 ECTS (T-17, M-12), the 2nd competence: 42 ECTS (T-10, M-32), the 3rd competence: 15 ECTS (T-4, M-11), the 4th competence: 14 ECTS (T-11, M-3), the 5th competence: 19 ECTS (T-16, M-2), and the 6th competence: 21 ECTS (T-3, M-18). Also, there is not a equilibrium between the transversal competences. The first transversal competence (application of the principles and norms of professional ethics, based on the explicit values, specific to the specialist in education sciences) has allocated only 4 credits. To the second transversal competence (effective cooperation in professional and interdisciplinary working teams, specific to the development of projects and programs development in the field of education sciences) there are allocated 26 credits. And for the last transversal competence (using effective methods and techniques for lifelong learning, in order to achieve pre-service and in-service professional development) there are 11 credits. The contents areas analysis of each discipline of study was focused by reporting to the grid no. 2 and we have noticed that it is imperative to have clearly defined the objectives, contents, teaching strategies and assessment in relation to the skills and competences concerned.

We strongly believe that for a better insertion on labor market and having well qualified teachers for preschool and primary school, it is necessary to make adjustments regarding: balance of adequate number of credits for each subject of study; balance of the psychological and didactical subjects; balance of the educational practicum in preschool and primary school; balance of the ECTS between transversal competences; to adequate number of credits for each professional competence; to improve the number of hours allocated to educational practicum; to made educational practicum in each semester; to update the contents of subjects; to focus on different types of assessment; to give more assignments focused on the reflectivity capacity etc. So, taking into consideration all of these and the ministerial order no. 5703/2011 through all universities are required to ensure through the academic curricula those skills and transversal competences to all students who will have a B.A. diploma on Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool (PPSP), we conceived the second version of the grid no. 2, based on the actual syllabus of PPSP, by following the core of Pedagogy specialization as study program. One of the main argument was based on the achievement of a joint academic year for all students from the first year of study that follow related programs to the main domain of Education Sciences. So, there were grouped in the first year of study as many pedagogical and psychological disciplines, and for the second and third years of study, the subjects/disciplines were directed according to the study program that gives the specialization followed.

The main difficulty consisted in designing an appropriate syllabus according to the grid no. 2, but doing that the university can provide a better quality teacher training service. And this can be achieved through a good theoretical knowledge of taught disciplines, by developing those skills which have to be formed to students, through a curriculum requirements and the materials which should be organized and structured on teaching contents; by knowledge of teaching and assessment methodology, focus on general and specific to each discipline; knowledge of students and of the human development process; to develop skills of efficiently teaching in different environments, to use wisely this knowledge, capacities and predispositions to serve the students' interests. The ethical dimensions of teaching also differentiate it from other professions. The teaching staff is required to carry out the ethical standards. Teaching is a public activity, and the teacher works in front of his/her students daily, and the fact that they together carry on an activity makes the teacher have a special type of behaviour, especially in being a model of a highly educated person. These features show how complexes the requirements are for quality teaching but it does not stress the difficulties, dilemmas or uncertainties the teacher encounters. The teacher's theoretical training is based on knowledge acquired constantly, although, it does not always offer enough support to the teacher. Since our university targets to a high quality of teacher training, there were made a few adjustments starting with the syllabus.

So, the second version was made after redesigning the syllabus for the B.A. program on Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool. The working methodology consisted in several steps: research, making a draft document based on the existing framework plan, consultation with all those involved in pre-service teacher training for preschool and primary school education, leading factors of the faculty and rebuilding the original working document. By doing that, we noticed some changes regarding the equilibrium between the professional and transversal competences, study subjects and credits allocated. So, regarding this if in the first version for the first competence we had 29 credits, now there are 34. The second competence can be achieved by having 38 credits instead of 42 (first version). Now, the third competence has 22 ECTS than 15. There were allocated 15 credits for

the fourth competence instead of 14. The fifth competence has 11 credits in detriment of the first version of the grid which had 18 credits. The last professional competence can be achieved through a 16 credits than 21 from the first version. Also, there can be noticed a fair equilibrium between transversal competences (TC): the 1stTC has 15 credits, the 2ndTC has 14 credits and the 3rdTC has 15 credits. By redesigning the syllabus of Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool program, there were removed some overlapping disciplines or those which weigh too much in terms of psychological perspective in detriment of teaching and applied didactics. Also, a good layout plan consists in adding new specific subjects, like History of Pedagogy and Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions. By doing that there was created a balance between educational practicum in kindergarten and primary school (in the first version there was only one semester of Educational Practicum in Preschool institutions, and now there are two semester of study). It was made a reorder of the subjects and of the allocated credits for each subject. Because of the constraint regarding the maximum number of hours per study year, there were made some regrouping of some applied didactics, like Mathematics Didactics for Preschool activities and primary school education; Didactics of History and Civic Education; Environmental studies, Geography and Sciences Didactics; Fine Arts Education and music education. Didactics. Of course, it would be much better if it would be allowed a greater number of hours for the academic year considering that this B.A. program on Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool is a vocational specialization and other the university take into account this aspect. In this way our students teaching didactics training will not be any more restricted to a smaller number of hours even than the number of hours/credits spent for studying foreign languages, and it will benefit of an appropriate number of studying hours for each type of teaching didactics. Doing this it would raise the quality of education, and especially of the professional development. But so far, the syllabus underwent an improvement in the sense of the correlation of the subjects with the targeted skills and competences. So, the syllabus was re-designed on those six professional competences and three transversal competences, as follows:

- *Professional competences:*

C1. Designing training programs or programs adapted for different age levels/training and target groups: Fundamentals of Pedagogy (2/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Psychology (2/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Special Education (2/5 ECTS); Curriculum Theory and Methodology (2/5 ECTS); History of Pedagogy (2/5 ECTS); Instructional Theory and Methodology (2/5 ECTS); Evaluation Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy (1/5 ECTS); Computer-Assisted Education (2/5 ECTS); Giftedness Psychology and Education/Infant care and child hygiene/Speech therapy (1 out of 3) (1/5 ECTS); Romanian Language (2/5 ECTS); Mathematics (2/5 ECTS); Literature and Children's Literature (2/5 ECTS); Mathematics Didactics for Preschool activities and primary school education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Language Development Activities in Preschool Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature for Primary School Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of History and Civic Education (1/5 ECTS); Environmental studies, Geography and Sciences Didactics (1/5 ECTS); ; Fine Arts Education and music education. Didactics (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Physical Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Practical Skills (1/5 ECTS); Practicum in educational institutions (1/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (1/10 ECTS).

C2. Accomplishment of educational activities in primary and preschool education: Fundamentals of Pedagogy (1/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Special Education (1/5 ECTS); Educational Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Curriculum Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Practicum in educational institutions (2/5 ECTS); Instructional Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Evaluation Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy (2/5 ECTS); Giftedness Psychology and Education/Infant care and child hygiene/Speech therapy (1 out of 3) (1/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (2/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (2/10 ECTS); Mathematics Didactics for Preschool activities and primary school education (2/5 ECTS); Didactics of Language Development Activities in Preschool Education (2/5 ECTS); Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature for Primary School Education (2/5 ECTS); Didactics of History and Civic Education (2/5 ECTS); Environmental studies, Geography and Sciences Didactics (2/5 ECTS); ; Fine Arts Education and music education. Didactics (2/5 ECTS); Didactics of Physical Education (2/5

ECTS); Didactics of Practical Skills (2/5 ECTS); Romanian Language (2/5 ECTS); Mathematics (2/5 ECTS); Literature and Children's Literature (2/5 ECTS).

C3. Assessing learning outcomes and progress of preschool/young school children: Curriculum Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Instructional Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Evaluation Theory and Methodology (2/5 ECTS); Practicum in educational institutions (1/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Mathematics Didactics for Preschool activities and primary school education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Language Development Activities in Preschool Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature for Primary School Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of History and Civic Education (1/5 ECTS); Environmental studies, Geography and Sciences Didactics (1/5 ECTS);); Fine Arts Education and music education. Didactics (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Physical Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Practical Skills (1/5 ECTS); Romanian Language (1/5 ECTS); Mathematics (1/5 ECTS); Literature and Children's Literature (1/5 ECTS); Educational Research Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy (2/5 ECTS); Information and Communication Technologies (2/5 ECTS); Developmental Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Computer-Assisted Education (1/5 ECTS); Classroom Management (1/5 ECTS).

C4. Managerial approaching of preschool class, teaching process and activities for learning/social integration related to the specific age of the target group: Classroom Management (3/5 ECTS); Developmental Psychology (3/5 ECTS); Personality Psychology (2/5 ECTS); Educational Psychology (2/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (2/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (2/10 ECTS); Computer-Assisted Education (1/5 ECTS).

C5. Counseling, guidance and educational assistance to various categories/ educational groups (preschool/ primary school students, families, teachers, employees etc.): Fundamentals of Pedagogy (1/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Special Education (1/5 ECTS); Educational Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Personality Psychology (2/5 ECTS); Educational Research Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Giftedness Psychology and Education/Infant care and child hygiene/Speech therapy (1 out of 3) (2/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (1/10 ECTS).

C6. Self-assessment and constant improvement of professional practices and career development: Information and Communication Technologies (2/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 1 (English/French/German) (2/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 2 (English/French/German) (2/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 3 (English/French/German) (2/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 4 (English/French/German) (2/5 ECTS); History of Pedagogy (2/5 ECTS); Educational Research Methodology (2/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (1/10 ECTS).

- *Transversal competences (TC)*

TC1. Application of the principles and norms of professional ethics, based on the explicit values, specific to the specialist in education sciences: Fundamentals of Pedagogy (1/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Fundamentals of Special Education (1/5 ECTS); Educational Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Curriculum Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); History of Pedagogy (1/5 ECTS); Developmental Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Instructional Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Evaluation Theory and Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Giftedness Psychology and Education/Infant care and child hygiene/Speech therapy (1 out of 3) (1/5 ECTS); Language (1/5 ECTS); Mathematics (1/5 ECTS); Literature and Children's Literature (1/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (1/10 ECTS).

TC2. Effective cooperation in professional and interdisciplinary working teams, specific to the development of projects and programs development in the field of education sciences: Personality Psychology (1/5 ECTS); Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy (2/5 ECTS); Classroom Management (3/5 ECTS); Practicum in educational institutions (1/5 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Preschool Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Educational Practicum in Primary School Institutions (1/10 ECTS); Mathematics Didactics for Preschool activities and primary school education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Language Development Activities in Preschool Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature for Primary School Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of History and Civic Education (1/5 ECTS); Environmental studies, Geography and Sciences Didactics (1/5 ECTS);); Fine Arts Education and music education. Didactics (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Physical Education (1/5 ECTS); Didactics of Practical Skills (1/5 ECTS).

TC3. Using effective methods and techniques for lifelong learning, in order to achieve pre-service and in-service professional development: Educational Research Methodology (1/5 ECTS); Computer-Assisted Education (1/5 ECTS); Information and Communication Technologies (1/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 1 (English/French/German) (3/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 2 (English/French/German) (3/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 3 (English/French/German) (3/5 ECTS); Foreign Language 4 (English/French/German) (3/5 ECTS).

Now, we are in the validation stage of the new grid by conceiving the analytical records of disciplines according to the content areas of these professional and transversal competences and the implementation of the new syllabus.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Through this article we described the process of setting up the competences' grid by making correlations between professional and transversal competences, content areas, study subjects and credits allocated to major Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool from the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi.

We made a content analysis, according to the grid no. 2, of the syllabus of Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool program in several steps: research, making a draft document based on the existing framework plan, consultation with all those involved in pre-service teacher training for preschool and primary school education, leading factors of the faculty and rebuilding the original working document. By doing that, we have noticed a major imbalance between professional competences and make some changes regarding the equilibrium between the professional and transversal competences, study subjects and credits allocated.

Conceiving the second version of the grid no. 2 according to the professional and transversal competences necessary for the B.A. program of Pedagogy of Primary School and Preschool, we recommend a periodic assessment of the syllabus for determining the effectiveness of teaching subjects and a rehabilitation of the educational plan of study.

Also, it is very important to continue the idea of this project through another one in which there should be develop appropriate tools and methods for assessing these professional and transversal competences. Ripamonti and Scaratti (2002) demonstrate the importance of the standardization of assessment procedures for the design of assessment tools intended to develop and enhance human resources in organizations.

Regarding the development and improvement of achieving these professional and transversal competences and if we want a higher quality of the education system, another route can be supported for teachers by following a professional master on applied didactics for each level of the education system. Only through a major investment into a quality of human resources in education training system we can speak about a progress of a society, and do not forget that an individual training starts with early education and therefore the more investment is needed to raise the quality of the human resources trained for this stage of life.

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